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EPA INVESTIGATES DOWNERS GROVE GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION

CHICAGO (Dec. 18, 2001 [?]) — U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 5 has launched an investigation into the source of recently-discovered groundwater contamination in unincorporated Downers Grove, Illinois.

The federal investigation will focus on properties at and near the Ellsworth Industrial Park, located south of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad tracks between Belmont Avenue and Interstate-355. The Downers Grove investigation grew out of the ongoing EPA/Illinois EPA-supervised groundwater cleanup activities at the Lockformer facility in unincorporated Lisle.

Since July 2001, Illinois EPA has sampled 471 private drinking water wells in Downers Grove, with 199 of the wells showing levels of trichloroethylene (TCE) and/or perchloroethylene (PCE) that were detected at concentrations above the federal drinking water standard of ~~five~~ 5 parts per billion (5 ppb). The maximum detected concentration was _____. The federal drinking water standard, or maximum detectable level (MCL), is the maximum permissible level of a contaminant in water which is delivered to any user of a public water supply.

Since the MCL includes many safety factors, it is considered to be protective of adverse health effects associated with long term use (>30 yrs) of residential water. Therefore, exceedance of the MCL does not necessarily mean that adverse health effects will result. However, for private well owners, exceedance of the MCL triggers a recommendation that either alternate water supply be obtained or application of treatment equipment to reduce the levels in the finished drinking water. [Q: clarify any of this? Can we avoid using the term MCL?]

- more -

EPA is the lead agency investigating the source of the contamination. The effort includes historical research into local waste disposal practices, environmental sampling, including installation of additional groundwater monitoring wells, and technical analysis to identify the source of the hazardous contaminant plume. Illinois EPA will continue to sample the private residential wells and track the plume. ~~Once the~~ If a remaining source is confirmed, EPA will oversee the removal or treatment of any material, pipelines, storage tanks, or containers suspected of causing the hazardous release.

Any enforcement action will proceed on a separate, independent timetable. (Since we don't know if this will happen, is it worth mentioning?)

About 600 homes in ~~unincorporated~~ unincorporated DuPage County have private wells which may be impacted. EPA contractors will soon be contacting local industrial facility owners seeking permission to review documents, conduct facility inspections, and collect soil or groundwater samples.

About PCE and TCE

~~Trichloroethylene and perchloroethylene~~ TCE and PCE are degreasing solvents commonly used in many industries and dry cleaning operations. Studies of people exposed to much higher concentrations of TCE in drinking water than the levels found at this site ~~low levels of TCE in drinking water~~ suggest low risk of adverse health effects such as skin rash, headache, dizziness, numbness, and fatigue.

Increased cancer risks. However, these effects would not be expected at the levels detected in the water samples at this site. For additional information about the effects of chemical exposure, see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) web site (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>) or call the ATSDR Information Center at 1-888-42ATSDR.

[Q: THIS IS A MUCH STRONGER RISK STATEMENT THAN IEPA USED IN THEIR LAST NEWS RELEASE. SHOULD WE RUN THIS STATEMENT BY AN IDPH/COUNTY HEALTH PERSON? WHO? MARK JOHNSON? CLAYTON KOHER?]

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